

Testimony before the Council of the District of Columbia
Committee of the Whole
Friday, February 29, 2008

**“Performance Oversight Hearing on the FY 2007-2008 Budget of the
Department of Education”**

Victor Reinoso
Deputy Mayor for Education

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee. I appear before you today to report on the performance of the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education during the past year. I am pleased to share that we are making progress toward our goals and we are excited about the opportunities ahead.

Progress to date

At our last oversight hearing in September, I described to the Council the four broad activities around which the work of the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education would be organized:

- Coordination of a District-wide educational strategy that addresses the needs of students, parents, and the community at all stages of the education lifecycle (early childhood to adult education)

- Coordination and direction of high-quality services and programs that reach across city agencies and educational institutions to improve child and youth outcomes
- Development of robust, collaborative partnerships with community based organizations and the private sector that provide the District's education system with the resources it needs
- Leadership and support to OSSE, OFM and Ombudsman to allow them to meet their mission of supporting and improving the delivery of educational services

Since that time, I reorganized my office from one focused on the transition in governance and on assuming responsibilities on behalf of the Mayor for public education functions to one that is clearly focused on targeted areas of work, while maintaining the capacity to provide support and creative thinking where needed. We are currently in the midst of completing this transition and expect to have a full complement of staff hired this spring.

During this period of transition, however, we have moved forward successfully on several fronts. I'd like to discuss briefly our progress to date.

Creating Opportunities for Success

The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education is well-positioned to address specific challenges, tackle special projects, and think strategically about the direction of the District's education reform efforts. This has enabled us already this year to take on work that will enable the Chancellor and State Superintendent to be more effective in their efforts. We are planning

around how to align our infrastructure and resources to outcome-driven priorities and to service gaps. This work is continuous and correlates directly with the top priorities of the Mayor.

We are engaged in two activities designed to realign our infrastructure resources to educational objectives. First, the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education leads the planning and coordination around school facilities, correlating to the Administration's view that school facilities, as public assets, should be used as part of the overall District strategy for delivering educational services to residents. In this role, my office provided capacity to the Chancellor and her team around analyzing data, creating strategies, engaging the community, and developing recommendations for the DCPS reorganization plan. This joint effort led to a proposal that, as we move forward with implementation, will enable the Chancellor to better provide high quality academic services to students across the city.

While the Chancellor and her team lead the school system through its transformation to a system of academic excellence, my team will continue to plan and develop policy for the most appropriate utilization of the excess school facility space. As we combine planning efforts with the city as a whole, there is tremendous opportunity here to provide additional public education and city services and supports for students and families.

Also this year, my team has been steadily working on the DCMR Title 5 revision project. While those familiar with the education system in the District know that revisions to Title V are much needed, the change in governance structure has intensified and expanded this need. We are currently in the procurement process to engage outside counsel in the legal drafting. We also

have developed a work plan to engage stakeholders around thematic areas, both inside and outside agencies. Separation of state and local rules will proceed along two closely coordinated tracks.

Another mechanism for better aligning our resources is to bring transparency to how we utilize them. To see how the District invests resources around the six citywide youth development goals across agencies, my office is working collaboratively with the Office of the City Administrator in developing a Children's budget with the advocacy community.

Approaching the Mayor's education reform agenda strategically through a big-picture, interagency framework allows us to identify gaps in academic and support services. One such example of the role the DME plays is our close work with DCPS on the development and implementation of an alternative high school model. This project began with the identification of the need for an alternative strategy for reaching older students who are at risk, either academically or because of school attendance and/or discipline issues, of dropping out or not graduating with a diploma. As an education strategy, an alternative high school program is definitely needed in order to reach these students and get them back on track toward achieving their potential. And as an ICSIC strategy, it will prove to be a useful tool in combating drop out and further at-risk behaviors among older youth. While still in the planning stages, my office has scanned best practices, identified the universe of potential partners, and identified possible sites for moving the project forward.

Integrating Services

The Interagency Collaboration and Services Integration Commission, led by my office, already is creating an impact on how we as a city increase the chances of success for our students. At the outset, the ICSIC agreed to adopt six citywide goals for youth as the umbrella guide for how to focus our conversations. The ICSIC has now completed its first round of meetings on each of the six youth development goals, and this month we reviewed progress on the first goal, Children Are Ready For School. We have accomplished the following around this goal thus far:

- Developed a definition for school preparedness.
- Developed a school preparedness assessment, which will be piloted in 50 preK and 50 kindergarten classrooms in April and May, with a planned city-wide rollout in Fall of next year.
- Tracking infant health indicators, including birth weight, blood lead levels, and immunization rates.

We have laid the groundwork for the other goals and I expect similar accomplishments. More importantly, we're seeing a real commitment and buy-in from the agencies toward this kind of integrated approach that we haven't seen before.

I am also excited to update the Council on the development of the pilot implementation of a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary assessment instrument that will identify at-risk youth, provide therapeutic interventions, and assist in the development of integrated service plans. This pilot was identified in the Public Education Reform Act as one of the key deliverables of the ICSIC. Development of this pilot was really contingent upon setting up the information sharing agreement between agencies. This has been signed by every participating agency and is now in place. We are currently finalizing the database for the pilot with OCTO and expect it will be up

and running within the next 60 days. We are working with the Chancellor to identify the pilot schools, with a plan to begin in two schools this April and four or five additional schools in August.

I share the following story to illustrate the impact we believe the ICSIC pilot can and will have moving forward: our ICSIC staff person called one of the elementary schools we are considering piloting in the fall to speak with the principal about the project. She explained how it would work, what would be involved, and that her school would get a social worker and a program that will provide increased services to students. The principal responded overwhelmingly, saying that she currently has a teacher that fills in as a counselor, but that the school had not had a full-time counselor in years. Apparently the school lost members of its community in the recent past and they are still recovering on their own. The principal said that my staff person was the angel looking out for her that day calling with such good news. I am excited about the potential for this pilot, and we are committed to not only providing the services to schools, but in doing so in a way that allows us to learn from the pilot schools and create a sustainable, scalable program to eventually reach all schools in the years ahead.

ICSIC has also made progress in the following ways:

- Developing RFPs for Evidence-Based Practice programs in next month for:
 - Home visitation programs for young at-risk families;
 - Training for school security staff ; and
 - Early childhood social emotional development programs.

- Brought on a Capitol City Fellow and we have hired the first clinician for the pilot project. Later this year, we will hire a program director to lead the expansion of the pilot program in the fall.
- Reached out to Boards/Commissions under ICSIC member agencies to explain ICSIC goals and seek their input.
- Completed a Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools grant for DCPS and 26 public charter schools and are applying for a Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Council, specifically the Chairman and the Chair of the Human Services Committee, for participating in the work of the ICSIC. As you have heard, we are beginning to have an impact and we are changing the culture around how we serve youth and families. I believe having the Council at the table for this work is important to our success.

Partnerships

Our work around partnerships takes on many facets: meeting with organizations seeking to support the Mayor's education reform efforts; tracking down and developing new partnership relationships, reviewing existing partnerships to better understand coverage and gaps and to determine their effectiveness, and enhancing the scope of existing successful partnerships to reach even more students.

Since October, my office has met with over 30 partner organizations and groups. Seven of those meetings have led to 7 new partnerships, including partnerships with the Ford Motor Co., NIH, and the Washington Performing Arts Society.

We also are working with the DCPS partnership office to audit current partnerships and mapping where the needs are. And finally, as part of the reorganization of schools, we are reaching out to partners at schools that are closing to work with them on adopting nearby receiving schools so that the same students, along with many new students, can benefit from the partnerships.

Ombudsman

The Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education was launched in December 2007. The Ombudsman, Tonya Kinlow, has hired an Associate Ombudsman and a constituent manager to assist her in resolving public concerns.

To date, the Ombudsman has dealt with 88 cases. Of those cases, 10 were walk-ins or in-person cases, 58 were by phone, and 20 were by email. The overwhelming majority of the cases deal with DCPS.

As part of her overall start-up strategy, the Ombudsman currently is working in several ways to engage the community and improve awareness and understanding of the Ombudsman services. She has been meeting with community groups and stakeholders to hear concerns and get input on how to best serve the public, while also meeting with representatives at the agency level to develop working relationships that will be critical to achieving resolution for future case issues. Also, a new, interactive Ombudsman website is currently in development and the newly-designed Ombudsman brochure is now available.

Other Agencies

In addition to the Ombudsman office, I work closely with both State Superintendent Gist and Allen Lew at OPEFM. As the Council is aware, both of these agencies are in the middle of massive transitions and at the same time have substantial performance mandates to improve existing, underperforming functions. I have two goals in mind regarding overseeing their work: ensuring they have the resources necessary and the support from other agencies in order to be successful and ensuring that their efforts are aligned with the Mayor's overall education reform agenda.

With OSSE, there are two looming priorities: aggressively tackling our broken special education system and addressing our federal high-risk designation. I believe the Council's oversight hearing earlier this week provided insight into the progress around both of those areas. We also are working closely with OSSE on a few other fronts, namely the development and implementation of a comprehensive student data warehouse and tracking system, strengthening our parent involvement mechanisms as a state, and supporting, with strong expectations of accountability, DCPS and public charter schools as they work to restructure or address deficiencies in student achievement.

OPEFM has a more narrowly defined, though no less daunting, task: repair, maintain, renovate, modernize, and construct as many of our school facilities as quickly, efficiently, and effectively as possible. OPEFM's job is to execute; they execute according to a capital budget and a facilities plan. We are working with OPEFM to revise the Facilities Master Plan, and I am

confident that we will meet the established deadline. With this project, my vision is not to totally redo or undo the significant amount of community engagement and professional work that went into the last draft plan. Instead, we look update the plan, aligning it with a reorganized school system, a more strategic focus for delivering education services, and budget realities. Also, we will work with OPEFM to ensure that we have a workable plan for meeting the Mayor's objectives this summer of stabilizing the rest of the school system facility inventory and getting all schools, particularly those receiving students through the Chancellor's reorganization plan, ready for opening in the fall.

Communication and Community Engagement

Although the Ombudsman office has taken on the primary role of resolving constituent issues, we continue to receive some calls and walk-ins from parents in need of help. As an example, after first meeting my staff at the Ward 7 Townhall meeting, a parent contacted us regarding her son, a special education student, who was suspended for 3 days for fighting. Not wanting her child to miss instruction and without guidance from the school why her child was suspended or how to ensure that he wouldn't fall behind, she sent her son to school and turned to us for assistance. We contacted DCPS central administration and had a special education representative meet with the principal and parent. Ultimately, the suspension was upheld, but the parent received the information as to why. Examples like this not only illustrate constituent service, but also inform our work around policy priorities, like strategies to deal with students with behavior issues and the alternative school model I mentioned earlier that is in development. Clearly we need better, other options for students, and this case demonstrates that.

We care very much about the role of the community and input it should have regarding public education. Likewise, we're consistently concerned with learning more about the on-the-ground impact that various policy recommendations and decisions have.

In that spirit, we continue to focus on improving our efforts to communicate with the public. We have updated and redesigned both the Mayor's Education Reform Center and the DME websites as sources of information for the public. In an effort to improve the shared understanding of our work with the Council and its constituents, we have begun briefings for Council staff around various topics. Finally, we are currently developing an overall communication plan that will incorporate strategies for both getting information out to the public and soliciting feedback as we develop policy proposals.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Council, for the opportunity to share with you the progress the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education is making. I look forward to your questions.